

## TWMN- Bhutan organizes journalism training

### Dadi Ram Ant,

#### Beldangi-II, March

The Bhutan Chapter of Third World Media Network has organized 21 days 'Basics Journalism Training' in Beldangi-II from January 27 until February 16.

Tej Kumar Chouhan, general secretary of TWMN-Bhutan informed TBR that some 48 candidates from Beldangi-I, II and extension showed their active participation. Hari Khanal, Bhutanese journalists, Kiran Lama, news anchor of Pathivara FM, Indra Timshina and



Dadi Ram Antim facilitated the training.

Meanwhile, two best news writers were selected each from male and female group at the closing session of the training. TWMN-Bhutan has managed merit certificates stating active participation in the training.

## HIGHLIGHTS

### New gewogs under Dagana

The three gewogs – Lhamoizingkha, Deorali, and Nichula – under L h a m o i z i n g k h a dungkhag have been transferred under Dagana dzongkhag jurisdiction as ordered by Prime Minister's Office. The decision was taken by the Lhengye Zhungtshog during its 277th meeting.

### Indian army Officials Visit

His Majesty King Jigme Khesar expressed happiness for strengthening relation between Bhutan and India during his audience to Lt. General CK Suchindra Sabu of the Indian Army on February 27.

King also highlighted the intimacy between armies of both the countries.

Sabu arrived Thimphu on February 26 on a five-day visit during which he would met the Chief Operations Officer of the Royal Bhutan Army, Goongloen Wogma, Batoo Tshering.

## Pathri Clash

## Vulnerable life continues in Sanischare camp

### TBR Correspondent Sanischare, March

The lives in Sanischare have become more difficult due to continued imposition of curfew by the local administration since a week.

On March 3, Friday, a team of National Human Rights Commission officials from Biratnagar visited the camp and surrounding areas. The team of human rights officials discussed the latest situation with police office in Pathri, Urlabari. The team also met the families of those killed in the scuffle.

The curfew compelled other exiled Bhutanese from other camps visiting their relatives in this camp to stay. About 17 people stranded here have been rescued Friday to their respective camps in the initiation of the UNHCR.

Water supply problem, discontinued after the scuffle, has been solved by fixing the electric wire cut during the scuffle. The ambulance service has resumed.

The local authorities and the UNHCR have been on constant discussion to normalize the situation.



Gopal Khadka who was killed by locals at Sanischare camp (Photo: HUOB)

The curfew has shut down all schools. The studies of the students, who would be appearing SLC examinations, soon, have been affected. Students attending colleges outside camps have not been able to attend class. Most college students ravel by bus or cycle from camps daily for their studies.

Parents urged the UNHCR and local authorities to escort the students to their colleges.

The situation, however, has not come to complete normalization. There are still probability of resuming scuffle

between the exiled Bhutanese and the local people.

The local people have been hunting exiled Bhutanese in the vehicles at various stoppages around Sanischare camp.

The exiled Bhutanese, who were rearing goats, compelled to sell them at low price as they no more can feed the animals with fodder.

The scuffle between the locals and exiled hutanese has claimed the lives of two youths including one from camp, Gopal Khadka, 22.

## TBR Notice

Due to lack of financial aid we are unable to publish TBR into hard copies from February, 2007. We are Compelled to take this decision as we began to air a weekly program from Nepal FM, 91.8 namely 'Saranarathi Sarokar'. But we will anyways upload TBR in an electronic copy (PDF format) at: <http://www.apfanews.com> until we find sponsors to fund for the expenses of TBR. We are sorry for the inconvenience caused to our valued readers.

- Editor

## APFA-Bhutan airs FM program

The Association of Press Freedom Activists (APFA) – Bhutan has begun airing a weekly program from Nepal FM 91.8, Kathmandu from February 24.

The program, *Saranarathi Sarokar*, is aired from the

station every Saturday at 8.15.

According to General Secretary of APFA - Bhutan, Vidhyapati Mishra, the program is aimed at drawing attention of government in Nepal to help resolve exiled Bhutanese issue at the earliest.

## Pathri incident

The lives in Sanischare camp have become more difficult due to continued imposition of curfew by the local administration since 'exiled Bhutanese-locals scuffle' on February 22, Thursday on the charge of stealing fire woods from the forest.

This is not uncommon scuffle to those in the previous days at different camps. However, an exiled Bhutanese youth was inhumanly killed by locals in the scuffle. This is one of the sad parts and needs strongest condemnation from all concerned authorities. Not only this, some dozens innocent people have been hurt during the scuffle. Still people at Sanischare camp have a sense of fear.

The incident that occurred, when there was adequate space for peaceful talks, is the latest instances of how locals residing near the camp areas treat exiled Bhutanese. Even if camp people were involved in stealing fire woods, the way locals demonstrated with strong demand of shifting the camp, is entirely against humanitarian stand-point for reacting to any disputes.

UNCHR including government of Nepal should urgently take measures to bring the tensed situation to normalcy. The compensation to the bereaved family of Gopal Khadka and to those who were hurt during the scuffle should be paid leaving no space to oppose. It is equally necessary to probe into the facts behind the incident and drag the criminals, whosoever it is, to the court of justice. Refugee's right to stay under safe and secured environment must be promoted by all individuals including concerned authorities.

## Column & Opinion

By: Purna P. Siwakoti

# Bhutan's Nepalese immigrants VS ruling elite

It has become long since Bhutan has an inconsistent situation emerged inside the country. Why did the Nepalese immigrants fail in assimilating themselves in the Bhutanese culture? It is equally significant to know reasons behind the eviction of these immigrants. Does Bhutan face a danger to its identity and integrity? These are some of the issues which draw careful and a precise revision.

The ethnic diversities in Bhutan have emerged as a main confront to the social fabric and the political systems. A sudden explosion of the ethnic conflict in the country has threatened its integrity and security. Long-standing co-existence between *Drukpas* and *Lhotshamps* (southerners, especially Nepalese Immigrants) has now developed strong undercurrents of ethnic tensions and conflicts owing to the professed hazard by the *Drukpas* to Bhutan's culture, national identity and integrity from Nepalese immigrants. A sense of discrimination and deprivation on the part of the Nepalese immigrants in Bhutan is another big issue.

### Nepalese Immigrants in Southern Belt

The history reveals that the Nepalese have emerged as a dominant ethnic group in the southern Bhutan. This region forms border with India and lies close to the Himalayan foothills in the Duars. Nearly a century ago southern division had hardly any cultivable land or population. This undeveloped region pushed-back people of northern part not to prefer it for settlement. We can say it was a forestry part where communicable diseases like malaria claimed many lives. The presently existed southern belt has undergone massive developments from Nepalese immigrants. On the other hand, economic transformations brought about in Sikkim, Darjeeling and Kalimpong areas through the Nepalese workers employed by the British in the tea gardens of Assam and Darjeeling encouraged the rulers of Bhutan to welcome the

Nepalese immigrants in Bhutan.

As new developmental activities have been initiated in the southern region, the significance of the Nepalese immigrants was widely felt.

Immigration of Nepalese to southern Bhutan started on a large scale after the signing of the Sinochula Treaty of 1865 between the British India and Bhutan which brought an end to the Duar Wars and established peace.

The Nepalese immigrants took no time in clearing forests and started cultivation. It was a direct migration from Nepal as well as a step migration from Darjeeling and adjoining areas of India. This clearly shows that the present Bhutan would have never come to this state had Nepalese immigrants sat ideally.

Nepalese immigrants in southern Bhutan have given this region the shape of a distinct linguistic-cultural region. Their food habits, dress, cultural traits and festivals are identical. In fact, the region may be characterized as a compact cultural region where Nepalese language and culture have become prominent. It is for these reasons that region is viewed as a menace to the *Drukpa* identity

### Discrimination on Nepalese immigrants

Although attempts towards assimilating Nepalese immigrants into the national mainstream of Bhutan continued, a change in the attitude of ruling elite was discernible in the eighties. A number of policy measures were taken with a view to consolidating Bhutan's national identity and integrity and on the other hand discouraging Nepalese immigrants. In 1988, the RGOB conducted a fresh census to implement the Citizenship Act strictly.

The earlier had included a number of persons who were not bonafide Bhutanese nationals. So this ethnic group suspected that the census had been initiated in order to evict them from southern Bhutan. Meanwhile, the government

passed a code of conduct called *Driglam Namza*. It stipulated a code of conduct as how to eat, how to sit, how to speak, how to bow before the authorities and how to dress. It appears that the basic idea behind the royal verdict was meant to strengthen the Bhutanese culture and developed it into a united public culture. However, it was an attempt towards Nepalese immigrant's Bhutanization which they resented vigorously.

The banning of teaching Nepalese language from the schools in Southern Bhutan in February 1991 is yet excellent evidence to justify suppression of ruling elite over Nepalese immigrants.

The beginning of 1990 was marked with the eruption of ethnic conflicts in Bhutan. The protest was observed in different forms. As a result Bhutan made a forcible eviction to about one lakh Nepalese immigrants including a portion of *Sharshops*. It has almost become 17 years that these refugees are spending horrific lives under the unimproved UNHCR-run camps in eastern division of Nepal. They are trying to build up pressure to concerned authorities for their dignified return but to no avail.

### Cultural and Traditional Diversity

The tradition and culture of *Drukpa* society and those of the Nepalese immigrants are different from each other. The former is a Lamaist Buddhist while the latter forms the Hindu cultural value system which is quite different. The Nepalese have not been able to integrate themselves in the traditional social structure of Bhutan. In fact, the Nepalese immigrants form a distinct cultural group and are proud of their own traditions. Hence, a cultural gap exists between the two communities, despite certain attempts by the RGOB.

There is an emotional attachment of each community towards their own culture and it beyond doubt fixed is in their psyche. The Bhutanese ruling elite feels that with the Nepalese influx in Bhutan, the *Drukpas* society may

face a cultural threat. The basic issue seems to be how to accommodate a different cultural group into the core culture of the country? This would require a prescriptive approach which the Bhutanese ruling elite has lacked so far.

### Rise in Suspicions

The attitude and behavior of the Nepalese immigrants have given rise to suspicions in the minds of the Bhutanese ruling elite. In fact, they feel greater affinity with India or Nepal. The Nepalese immigrants have not much tried to adjust to their new homeland. Instead, they have looked across the national boundaries and security.

The ruling elite of Bhutan have begun to believe that the increase in the number of Nepalese immigrants not only creates problems for Bhutan's ruling class but it also endangers the country's identity, integrity and security. This is no more than means to suppress Nepalese immigrants.

### Political Orientation

The Nepalese immigrants in Bhutan have a different political orientation. Among the Nepalese there are persons who are politically active and they have trained in democratic or Marxist political values in India or Nepal and maintained close links with their counterparts in these countries. Their loyalty towards Bhutanese political system is suspect. Owing to their political orientation they are finding it difficult to adjust to the existing political structure of Bhutan. They have not failed to mobilize the *Drukpa* society in their goodwill, seemingly on account of their diverse ethnic background and their alienation from the society.

Hence, the presence of Nepalese immigrants in politics is a source of threat to the traditional political structure of Bhutan. The revealing fact is that the so-called democratic movement launched by Nepalese immigrants doesn't have its roots in the Bhutanese society. They seem to look for support and sustenance across the national boundaries.

# Isn't this an idiotic world?

By: RN Bista

Leave alone the routine and psychologically—tormenting past and the present, virtually “killing” every Bhutanese refugee, of late the extreme wintry atmospheric “outburst” is seemingly taking a toll, raging through all the camps, adding insult to our injuries. The ruthless icy cold, stealing through every hole of the four walls of mostly termite—eaten bamboo sheets, is teasing and wreaking havoc especially to the minors and the helpless. New born babies and small children cry out of deep pain for having to fight “sleepless and ruthless” nights apparently due to steadily plummeting mercury. Besides, feeding mothers lay whole night “vigil” lullabying and soothing their mostly underfed infants. Add to the woes, the old and the sick carry a story of sorts—amidst the turbulent wintry tremor, many spend the reckless nights moaning, groaning and cursing their fates while a few seem to have resigned their fates and lay restlessly counting their days. Further, the meager food only meant to stick our body and soul together mocks halfway demanding more calories to counter the icy cold. Undeniably, the diminishing canvass of this sort reminisce the nightmare that many of our early expatriates had once gone through some 16 years ago at Maidhar. In a nutshell, the most traumatic of the wounds that the entire camp inmates have to live through and subsequently endure is the “venomous shots” of follies, lies, betrayal and hollow promises that often emanate from the “meaty and mealy” mouths of our so-called regional protectors. Interestingly, most of the high-profile visiting “yogis” swaying and leaping from the southern corridor seem to howl the same hollow, routine and typically stereotypical version—the camp inmates deserve to be repatriated with dignity and honor at the earliest and that’s all! When it comes to immediate materialization, they usually seek to retreat to their own hide-outs for good. Isn’t this a mockery and more precisely a brazen show of indifference towards a chunk of “desperate population “literally dying” right under their noses in their neighborhood? Above all, the irony hits its peak when the stalwarts from New Delhi frequently “trickle” their Gandhian preaching and notes on regional harmony, prosperity, brotherhood, democracy and freedom in Nepal. If our so-called “Biggy” is seriously concerned about Nepal’s peace, prosperity and well—beings, are the Bhutanese refugees not one of the major problems of this war, ravaged nation? Can’t these advocates of Gandhiji help her small northern neighbour relieve from one of the “freakiest” burdens from her still—ailing shoulder? Indeed, how it would be, if these humans ever care to spare a moment and feel the “pangs” of those who have been constantly subjected to broken huts and half meals for several years in a far-off land as refugees for no fault of their own despite having their generational identity and a long history of sacrifice in Bhutan.

## FROM REGIME

### NA to have 47 members

The Delimitation Commission has proposed dividing 20 dzongkhags into 47 constituencies. According to the proposal put forward by the commission, Trashigang will have highest number of constituencies, electing 5 MPs for the National Assembly (NA).

Samtse dzongkhag in south has four constituencies followed by Mongar and Pema Gatsel with three seats each. All other dzongkhags have two seats each. Each constituency will have around 10,000 eligible voters. The commission has also increased the geogs from existing 201 to 205.

In a press meet, CEC Dasho Kunzang Wangdi said that care was taken to ensure that gewogs were not fragmented between different constituencies and due recognition was given to the present level of socio-economic development and commonality of interests of communities.

## Interview

# Equality needed better addressed - Jasodha

Jasodha Budathoki, wife of late R. K. Budathoki (founder president of Bhutan Peoples’ Party), is currently working as President of Women Organization of Bhutan (WOB) founded in August 21, 1990 in Garganda, India. Budathoki is also Central Committee Member of both Bhutanese Movement Steering Committee (BMS) and National Front for Democracy (NFD). T. P. Mishra of Bhutan News Service (BNS) talked to her on various contemporary issues. Excerpts:

**BNS: How are you leading WOB?**

**Budathoki:** I have been especially focusing on international campaign rather than lingering in camp based activities. Similarly, WOB is actively moving ahead making camp women united. We are conscious of leading the organization independently.

**BNS: What is the situation of women in camps?**

**Budathoki:** Comparatively, the condition of women in camps is more vulnerable. They are backward in most of the subjects. Actually, Bhutanese women are not in a position to tell their hidden sorrows and pains in an open forum. The fact that they lack better opportunities cannot be denied.

**BNS: What is the crux of their problems and solution?**

**Budathoki:** Women in camps are strictly barred from coming

outside to work independently. The best solution would be – women be treated equally as men. Refugee aid agencies can also play vital roles. They can be provided with better opportunities. Women also do have qualities like men, thus, a sense of suppressing women should get abolished.

**BNS: What is the role of women for Bhutan democracy?**

**Budathoki:** I think it may not get differed to exactly that of male. Bhutanese women can show their moral, logistic and physical support in every movement meant for inclusive democracy. Let me add that the WOB is always joining hands with those organizations working for establishing democracy in Bhutan. WOB has a clear stand of supporting only the option of dignified repatriation to original homeland, Bhutan.

**BNS: But Bhutanese movement is getting shadowed?**

**Budathoki:** The delay in repatriation process cannot be ignored. But, I think one day we will definitely return to our original homeland if we are committed to work with common consensus and in a unified way. It is necessary to admit the fact that our movement will never stop unless Bhutan is forced to take back its genuine citizens, currently languishing in Nepal and different states of India.

**BNS: It is believed that Bhutanese movement is backpedaled in absence of Lt. R.K. Budathoki. What leadership qualities was he having?**

**Budathoki:** I do strongly support this view. I just want to say that our movement has really missed one of the courageous, dedicated and most influential leaders for Bhutan democracy. But there is no instrument that can enlist the qualities that he had. It would be better to let the people realized his qualities than me telling.

**BNS: How are the lives in exiled going?**

**Budathoki:** With the long term stay inside unimproved camps, there is rise in frustration and mental depression among youngsters and older people. The wave of third country resettlement has succeeded in grasping attraction of some of the youths, which is normal. However, majority of people are still wishing to return home rather than opting relocation. In reality, some of the so-called opportunists are trying to bring confusions within innocent exiled Bhutanese.

**BNS: State latest WOB programs?**

**Budathoki:** We are eagerly waiting for the result of re-registration process jointly carried by the UNHCR and Nepalese government. WOB will then stress for its campaign towards repatriation at international arena.

## ICJ to probe into counter-terrorism laws in South Asia

The Eminent Jurists Panel on Terrorism, Counter-terrorism and Human Rights is holding public hearings in New Delhi on 27-28 February to assess the responses of South Asian countries to acts of terrorism and their impact on human rights.

The Panel will be represented by its Chair, Arthur Chaskalson, former Chief Justice and first President of South Africa’s Constitutional Court and Vitit Muntarbhorn, leading human rights advocate and Professor of Law in Bangkok, who is currently United Nations’ expert on human rights in North Korea. The hearing will be co-organized by the Institute of Social Sciences (ISS) and the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ).

“South Asia has lived through serious terrorist threats, both past and present. In response, countries have resorted to extraordinary laws, many of which have raised considerable concerns as to their impact on human rights and the rule of law”, said Justice Chaskalson. “In times when the world is struggling to find a measured response to terrorism we want to hear about the experiences and the lessons to be learnt from South Asia.”

The public hearing is part of a global inquiry by the Panel. It is the eleventh in a series of hearings held around the world by the Panel, a high-level and independent group appointed by the ICJ in October 2005. The Panel will issue a global report in autumn 2007.

“States have a duty to protect their citizens but must do so within and not outside the rule of law”, said Professor Muntarbhorn. “We came here to listen to a wide range of perspectives reflecting both the demands of security and the need to protect human rights.”

In two days of public hearings at the Ashok Hotel, the Panel will hear testimonies from present and former state officials, leading lawyers, senior retired judges, journalists, and national and international civil society organizations. Participants are coming from India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and the Maldives. The Panel will subsequently travel to Pakistan to complete its study on South Asia.

# Refugees Newspaper print run ends

Written by: David Brewer  
News & Features - South Asia

A newspaper published by journalists living in the Bhutanese refugee camps in Nepal can no longer be printed because of a lack of funds.

The Bhutan Reporter, a monthly with a print run of 1,000, began publishing in 2004.

Since then it has been produced and financed by a handful of refugee journalists stationed in all seven refugee camps and working unpaid.

Now, those producing the paper say they can't afford the 2,000 Nepalese rupees (\$22) it costs to print hard copies of the newspaper each month.

The Bhutan Reporter (TBR) is published by the Bhutan Media Society, the publishing house of the Association of Press

Freedom Activists (APFA) - Bhutan.

The newspaper is uploaded to that site in .pdf form, but the majority of people living in the refugee camps is not online and is unable to download it.

The TBR journalists can reach some of their audience via a weekly radio programme 'Saranathi Sarokar' (Refugee Concern) broadcast on Nepal FM 91.8 in Kathmandu, but according to TBR editor, TP Mishra, publishing hard copies of the newspaper is the best way to reach the target audience. The TBR team has now appealed to the Bhutanese community overseas and international media organisations for financial aid to enable them to continue to print the newspaper. Editor, TP

Mishra, says it is important the paper survives.

"The media situation inside Bhutan is strictly under government threat. Organisations like APFA-Bhutan, established in the refugee camps, are trying to bring Bhutan's suppressed media in the international arena."

Staffs at the TBR say that raising 2,000 Nepalese rupees (\$22) a month would ensure the print run continues. If they can increase that to 14,000 Nepalese rupees (\$150) a month they would publish TBR weekly instead of monthly. But the priority for the TBR team is to ensure that the 1,000 hard copies are printed each month and delivered to all seven refugee camps and beyond.

Source: Media Helping Media

## SMC meeting ends inconclusively

### TBR Correspondent Kathmandu, March

The second meeting of the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) Ministerial Council (SMC) held in Kathmandu on February 26 ended in a deadlock as the disagreement between India and Pakistan surfaced. India raised the issue of non-compliance of the SAFTA by Pakistan and stated that Pakistan had resorted to selective implementation of the multilateral trade agreement in the case of India, violating SAFTA agreement.

India also warned that it could withdraw market access facilities to Pakistan, if Pakistan refused to open up its market for Indian products as agreed in the pact. Similarly, Pakistan claimed that India had not extended to it the Most Favored Nation status even though it granted the status to India.

Commerce ministers of all SAARC countries took part in the meeting, which was dominated by Indo-Pak word war. SAFTA signatories are to allow each other to freely trade in 4,200

items approximately. India said Pakistan, instead of allowing it to trade in the 4,200 items freely, had provided it with a 'positive list' of only 773 items, for which there is no provision in the SAFTA agreement. India also maintained that it had offered every concession to Pakistan that had been granted to other SAFTA members by it. SMC asked both the countries to sort out the differences and report the progress in the next SMC meet to be held after six months.

## Nepti and grandma

Series -1

... Nepti Lamhu Sherpa was born in 1986 in Dagana, one of the most remote districts in Bhutan. Her father died in Bhutan when she was just four. A year after the death of her father, she had to leave Bhutan with her mother and grandma.

When she reached Maidhar in 1992, where Bhutanese refugees were given shelter at the initial phase, she was very sad to witness sick and most vulnerable condition of people who arrived there earlier. "We came from a cold place in Bhutan. I felt terrible heat as we stayed in a bamboo hut built in sea-shore of Kankai Mai River", she laments.

When her family was shifted to Beldangi camp, Nepti was quite happy. She began her schooling days from Pancha-oti English School.

Nepti was trapped with another tragedy when her mother eloped with a stranger. Her mother stays some where in India and she has no ideas of exact location "I saw her six years ago when she visited me", Nepti says. Now Nepti stays with her grandma. Her grandma, Thang Singh Sherpa, is 83 years old. She has low vision and audibility.

Nepti has to do everything for herself and dearest grandma. "It is not an easy task to run a family. I have

no one to assist my survival", she says with her eyes full of tears. She hardly manages time for her studies. However, she is a committed student. Due to domestic and other problems, she was forced to repeat her classes in grade seven and eight. When asked about the reason of her failure, she says "nothing" but trickled tears down her cheeks. "I am my own father or mother."

Nepti reads in grade nine in Pancha-oti English School. She goes to school at 8:15am and gets back to her hut at 3:00pm. She weaves cap or works in cottage industry of wool run around the camps during her holidays to earn her livelihood. She even sells ration to buy clothes for grandma and her school uniform.

One of her teachers, Ram Dahal commented that she is very laborious and hardworking in her class. She often goes lost when she makes a recall of her lovely and caring parents. She is worried about her future. "I have no one to support for my studies after I pass grade ten" she laments. She has missed her parental care. Nepti is amongst many in the Bhutanese refugee camps facing similar problems at such an early age. She wishes that her mother soon pays a visit to her...

By: Vidhyapati Mishra

Published by: IP Adhikari Chief Editor: Kazi Gautam, Editor: Thakur P Mishra, GPO 8975, EPC 2377, Kathmandu Nepal, Email: editibr@yahoo.co.uk

**TBR**  
Correspondents

Special Correspondent: Jeetan Subba, Bel-I: Ganga R Kalikotey, Bel-2: Ratna Bdr Khadka, Bel-3: Yadhu Nath Neopane, Sanischare: Ravi C Dhungana, K/bari: Ganga Ram Adhikari, Goldhap: Tika Ram Lamitarey, Damak: Pabi Maya Rai, Birtamod/Bhadrapur: Kedar Niroula, Trivikram Adhikari, Biratnagar: Devi Pokhrel, Dharan: Tek N Mishra, Siliguri: Dhana Pati Acharya, Delhi/Patna: Mahananda Pokhrel, Kolkatta: Purna Siwakoti, Bhutan: Binod Sanyashi/Sangay Oendray